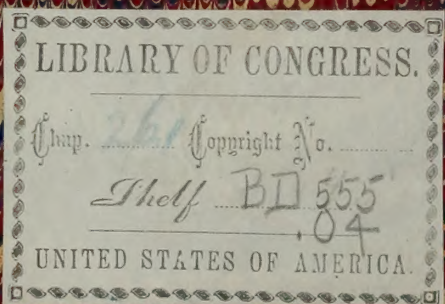


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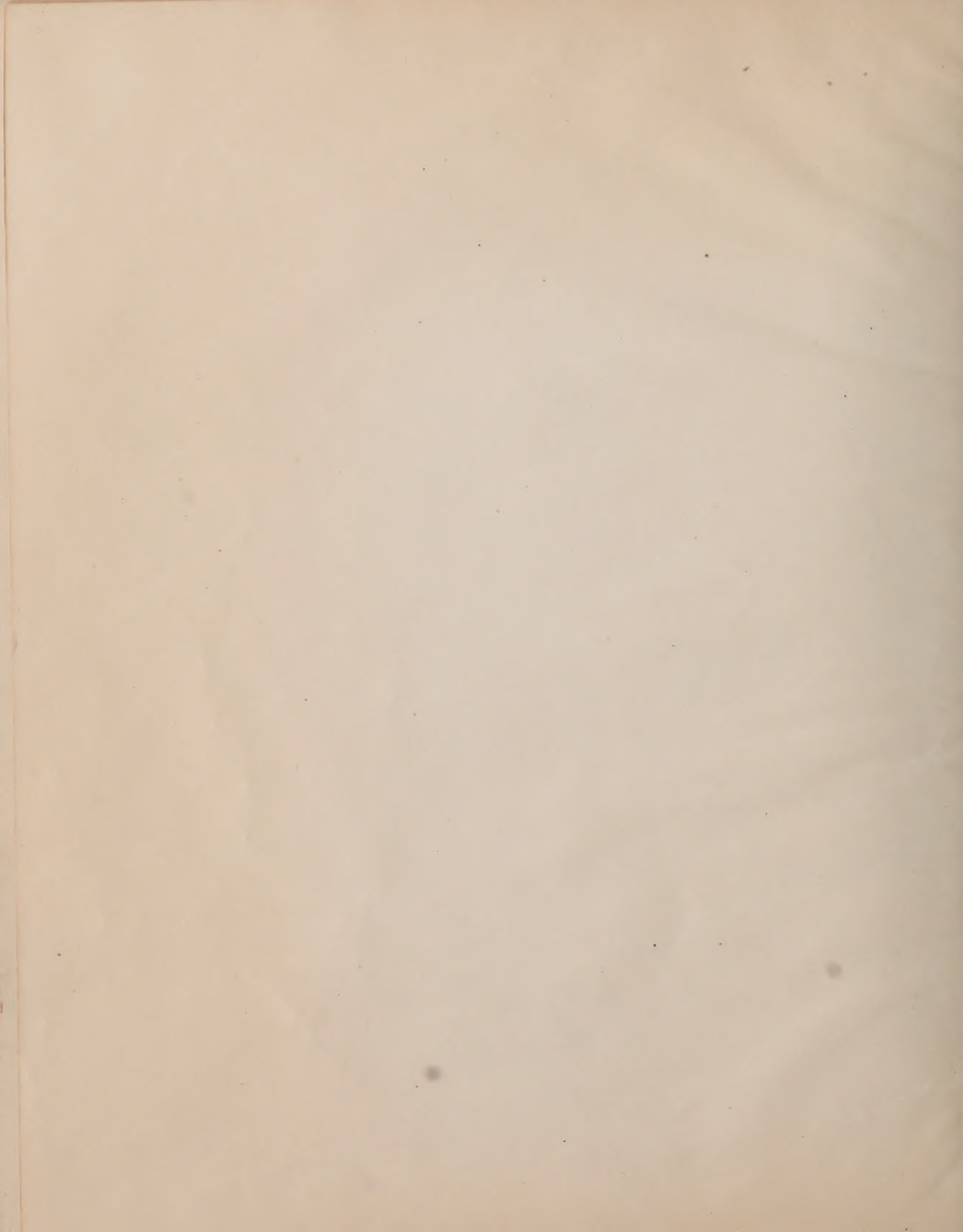


















Bind for Title

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Authority

— or —

The Philosophy of  
Personalism.

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New York. November 16. 1871.

To

2147

The Very Reverend J. T. Kecker.

Sometime ago a lady lent me to read, a book bearing your distinguished name as Author, & entitled "Aspirations of Nature". Having perused it, and being impressed with its fair and impartial spirit, but, at the same time, failing to be convinced by its arguments, I returned it with the following memorandum written by me on one of its pages.

"If each man is his own authority, according to the preceding remarks in this book, (and that is conceded,) then an authoritative church is impossible, because it presents an authority external to me, and then asks me to accept it. I admit that, if there is to be any church, it must be of divine origin. Even were the Bible inspired and infallible, I, being fallible, must interpret it fallibly, and therefore it must be the same to me for all intents and purposes as if it were a fallible book. The same argument applies to the church as a divine, authoritative institution - what is outside of the man - that is, the so-called fact is not an authority for him; but he is the authority for it; if







not an absolute authority, at any rate, the only authority possible. The trouble arises from the Baconian philosophy, which has attempted to build up a system on facts so-called - without regarding the authority for these facts - as if the authority were in the fact itself."

Soon afterwards, I received through the lady the following answer from a person then unknown to me, but who, I have since been informed, is a Father in your Church.

"The objection of your friend against the infallible Bible interpreted by a fallible reason, as a sure rule of faith, is unanswerable. Nothing stronger could be said against the Protestant position.

"His objection against the church, so far as it goes, if I understand it correctly, is also unanswerable. It is quite evident that no agglomeration of fallible men can make an infallible church, - either by the personal authority of the individuals or in virtue of their agglomeration. But that is, by no means the question with us.

"We deny that the church is simply an







agglomeration of men; and we deny that the infallibility comes by the authority of its members in any way.

"As Christ is a Theanthropical person, so also the church is a Theanthropical society, of which Christ is the head, the Holy Ghost the soul, and the regenerated men the body. The infallibility comes from the Holy Ghost, through Christ, to the body.

"If it is so, it is evident that the infallibility will remain as long as the union shall last. And in that supposition the learned lawyer cannot fail to see that infallibility does not, in any way, come to the body by the authority of its members, but from God, the only authoritative and absolute power in the world, which can bind the minds as well as the wills of men.

"That is the Catholic question, and the real position we maintain."

To that communication I immediately, and with less care and precision than I should have done, had I known its destination, returned this reply.

"The note given me does not meet the question. It is claimed that the church is infallible





because a divine institution - that is, because established by God.

"Now, admit it to be a divine institution, if it is to be presented for our acceptance, it must be for the acceptance of our fallible reason.

"For example, when the missionary carries the church to the heathen, does he not present it for their rational acceptance? And if so, does he not ask their finite judgment to pass upon and accept the infinite and the absolute?

"Now, the point is this: if the thing or truth presented be infinite and absolute, and the person to whom it is presented be imperfect, fallible, and conditioned, how can the truth - or the church, if you please - appear otherwise to him than according to his finite and partial interpretation of it?

"The question in respect to the absolute is, not whether it be really true and absolute or not, but to what extent does the personal affirmation go respecting it. In short, must not the same argument obtain against the church as against the Bible?

"It comes to the question of authority; and, if all intelligent authority resides in the person, -





(and certainly each one must, from the nature of ~~the~~ his constitution, be his own authority), then it follows that no authority whatever can reside in the state, the church, or in any mere institution or being outside of the person, whether that church or institution assume divinity or not.

"The authority is not in the so-called fact, but in the person to whom the so called fact is presented, and who is called upon to pass upon it.

"The Baconian system is false, because it makes the so-called fact the authority for itself; when plainly the very existence or comprehension of the so-called fact depends wholly on the person to whom it is presented."

These notes furnished the text for the able article in the last issue of the "Catholic World" entitled "Authority in Matters of Truth", which I understand is due to your pen.<sup>1</sup>

The essay was perused by me with much pleasure and profit, as emanating from one of the chief lights of the Catholic Church, and by informing me of the ~~external~~ mental process which took you thither. How fortunate that I am able on this topic to

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1. Catholic World for November 1871.





address one who, although a stranger to me personally, having entered the Catholic Church by the gate of reason, cannot afford to shut it behind him; who even advances to the length of declaring, "What contradicts reason, contradicts God."

Much of your essay is devoted to the discussion of the question of the reality of phenomena; that is, of the reality of the objective world; an inquiry appearing to me of little importance, for reasons hereafter explained; but I think nevertheless your views on that subject untenable.

The arguments urged by you, are none of them unfamiliar to me. They furnish the Common Sense Philosophy of which Sir William Hamilton is the last great expounder, and which may best be illustrated by the following quotations, cited by him with approval.

"The man of common sense believes, and will not but believe that the object he is conscious of perceiving is the real one."

(Schelling.)

"God would be a deceiver; were we constrained by nature to believe in the reality of an unreal world."

(Descartes.)





"We know what rests upon reason; we believe what rests upon authority."

(St. Austin.)

"But how can that be false, which every tongue of mortal man affirms for true?"

(Sir John Davies.)

"There is no other use of Reason, than to judge of Good and Bad, Justice and Injustice, Wisdom and Folly, and the like; that a man may thereby attain Knowledge to distinguish Truth from Error, and to determine his actions accordingly."

(Lyons.)

"The statesman continues to plod, the soldier to fight, and the merchant to export and import, without being in the least moved by the demonstrations that have been offered of the non existence of those things about which they are so seriously employed. And a man may as soon by reasoning, pull the moon out of her orbit, as destroy the belief of the objects of sense."

(Reid.)

"To perceive what does not exist is impossible."

(Reid.)





Hamilton himself states the point thus plainly;

"When I concentrate my attention on the simplest act of perception, I return from my observation with the most irresistible conviction of two facts; or rather, two branches of the same fact, that I am and that something different from me exists."

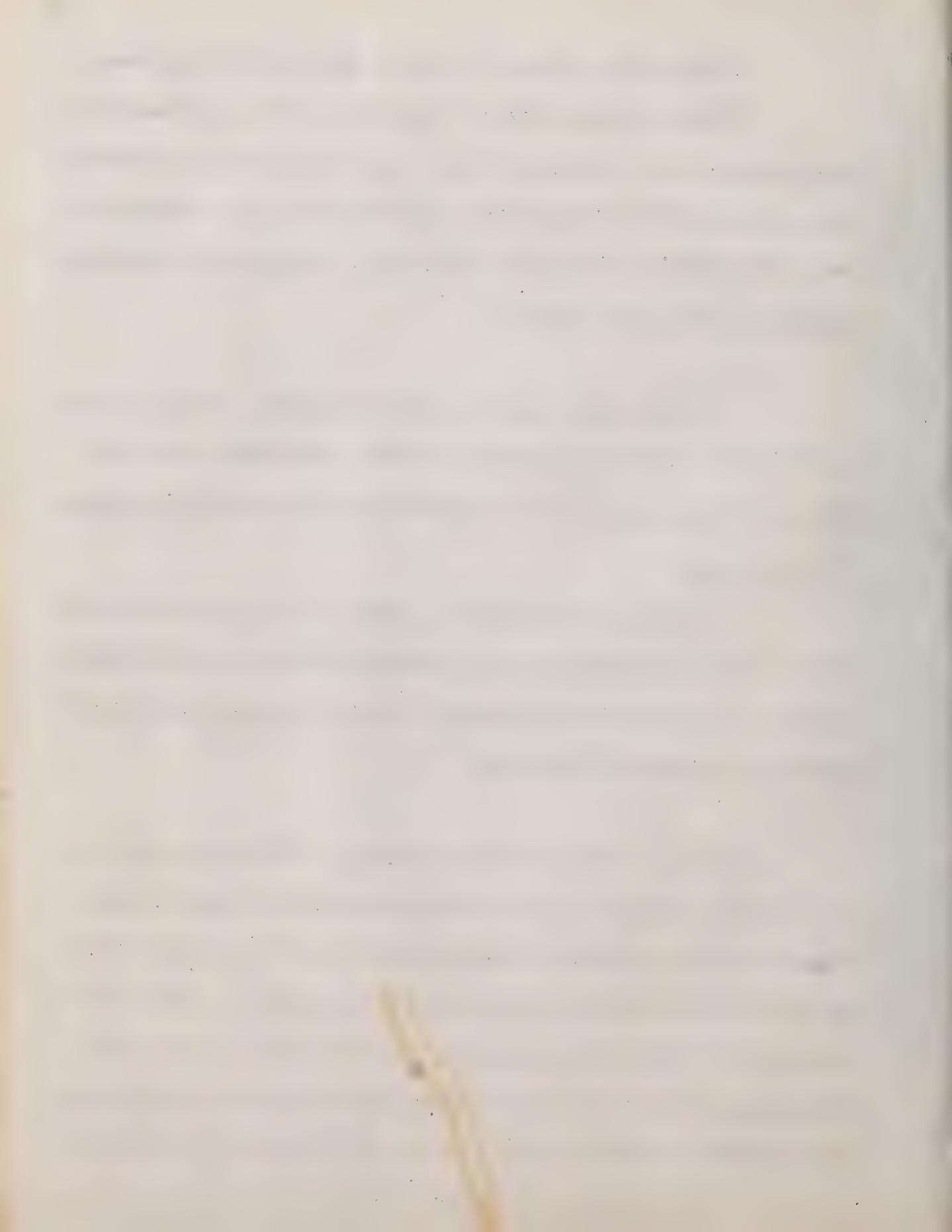
But how can that philosophy be reconciled with this modern unanswerable criticism on the Novum Organum by one of the Editors of the Encyclopædia Britannica?

"The fact however is, that, in as far as science has yet advanced, no one essence has been discovered, either as to matter in general, or as to any of its more extensive modifications" <sup>1</sup>.

Since Lord Bacon's day, his class of uncertain facts has, to such an extent, come to include all his other, so called facts, as to render the inductive method practically worthless. The microscope, the spectroscope, the telescope, and the thousand and one appliances of modern science have upset most of his favorite theories, because

<sup>1</sup>. Encyclopædia Brit. V.1. (Dissertations) p. 589.





they were founded on so called realities, which are found no longer to exist. Further than that, the great discoveries of this age are not by induction, but by purely mental processes, and a priori reasoning.

Historically, at least, fixed truths are unknown to human intelligence. The law of change and incertitude seems impressed upon every object of contemplation. Indeed, change is the condition of things finite: while things without change we call eternal. To man, nature is unquestionably heterogeneous and not homogeneous, and its apparent evolution is endless.

But, I am not endeavouring to establish either the reality or unreality of thought, or of things thought of.

I object to your assumption of the reality, and insist that not only is the assumption unwarranted by history and experience, but that it is unnecessary to a reasonable human philosophy. I cannot deny the appearance of whatever is presented to my intelligent comprehension - that I grant. The Phenomena must be admitted, but reality of that phenomena, its essence, is not





10.

within the scope of my intellectual vision. Nor is it necessary that it should be. It is enough for us, either for the purposes of our inner consciousness or of external every day life, that we recognize the impossibility of our denying that which appears, or that which <sup>we recognize as appearing; but which</sup> may or may not actually exist. Permit me to illustrate my meaning.

"What was that baby's name?" demanded Coppertoes sharply.

"He was christened John, but his name was first Bobo, and then Bosun, and then Jacko, and then Jack, and at last when he grew up, John again."

"Now this bubble that had been blown in his head did two things; it made everything that he looked at seem to have a rim of rainbow round it, which, you know, it really never has; and it gave him the power of dreaming when he was wide awake, so that it was almost as good as a wishing cap, for he could be and do and have whatever he liked, so long as the dream lasted."

"Really and truly, Uncle?" said Lightfoot, with plaintive doubt. "No, my dear child, not really and truly in one sense, but really and truly





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in another, which, so far as this world is concerned, comes very much to the same thing. But you will understand that better one of these days." (James Russell Lowell)

You are aware that it requires about 4000 years for a ray of light to reach this earth from a star of the 12<sup>th</sup> magnitude; and hence although the star may have been blotted from the universe that length of time, it still appears to us. It appears certainly not as it is at this moment, but as it was 4000 years ago. This is as well established as any other scientific fact. Now what does the common sense of mankind at large say about this? Why, that it sees the star or planet as it is to day. Tell the common sense man that the star he is observing, may actually have been out of existence 4000 years, and his "common sense" indignantly replies, "Don't I see it?" "Is my intellect false in what it knows?"<sup>1</sup> or he exclaims in the language of Reid, "To perceive what does not exist is impossible!"

Again, take the notion of correlation. Can there be the idea of the unit, the simplest form of what is called mathematical truth, without the idea of

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1. Authority in Matters of Faith. Catholic World for Nov. 1871. p. 146.





plurality accompanying it? Can you have the unit one in reality, without insisting upon more than one? Now, can there be both one and more than one at the same time? You may say it is possible, but I reply, not to your comprehension.

It is not to be denied that what is axiomatic answers the ends of the true and real for all the purposes of our human correspondence, - a benign provision, perhaps, to subserve the necessities of our finite being, - and its unreal character may not be obvious to us, requiring as it does, the same infinite comprehension to distinguish the unreal as the real; but that anything is really and absolutely true cannot be proved, and all analogy is hostile to the assumption. It may be taken as a rule, that no universal sentiment establishes a truth.

If it is answered me, that then my argument itself may be fallacious, I reply, it is possibly so, and philosophy and experience teach me highly probable; but if it be so, I see no objection to the recognition of that law of incertitude. It can only be said we are so constituted; and it is much wiser, and more modest, to acknowledge it, than to insist upon the attribute of absolute knowledge, which, with our conception of





His attributes, belongs to God alone.

You commence your article by asserting that "the intellect is never false in what it knows, for every one knows that he knows;" by which you mean, probably, that his knowledge to that extent is absolute. But this is the very question to be decided; and surely a vicious circle is created in an appeal to reason in proof of its own credibility. It seems to me I have shown conclusively that the nearer one gets to absolute knowledge, the less he knows about it, and the more profound his understanding, the less he thinks he knows.

You say again, "If the intellect is universally fallible, we may as well close the discussion at once, for nothing can be settled." In reply, it can be settled that — nothing can be settled. You will enquire again, how am I sure of that proposition, if I say it is not possible to settle anything? My answer is as before that, in my opinion, and according to my best judgment, we are finite, imperfect and conditioned beings, and cannot therefore step beyond the bounds of the finite and conditioned. As we are constituted, we necessarily think and decide involuntarily according as evidence appears to us, and our judgments may or may not be true. All to be said of





them is that they are undeniable, which is very different from saying that they are true; but, to decide that they are really and essentially true, is beyond our power. The essence of things evades us, and can be apprehended only by the infinite mind. Such a conclusion is moreover consonant with a sound and sufficient philosophy. We shall see, by and by, how the philosophy which in one sense belittles man, in another elevates him to the God-like attribute of personal judge, and his own moral arbiter. How he thus, and thus only, becomes to himself the sole authority in the correct acceptance of that term.

Thus I think I have answered the substantial matters of your dissertation. I have not deemed them very important, in a philosophical sense; because, whether the objective world does or does not exist, or whether we do or do not think it to exist, or whether our thoughts are or are not real - ~~and~~ whether we do really think we think - these, while topics of curious inquiry, have for a long time seemed to me of little account compared with another subject which you apparently have not considered. I refer to the question of "authority".

Your understanding of the meaning and interpretation of that word differs from my own. You say that





the objections urged in my notes, rest on two principles, "first, that the mind or intellect is universally fallible." There you are wrong. I do not assume it is fallible; I only object to your assumption of its infallibility; "and the second, that the authority in matters of faith is in the mind itself and not out of it." On the contrary, I deny that authority is in the mind, (i. e. in reason.)

Again, you repeat, "If the lawyer's rule that authority is not in the object, but in the mind" &c. You also mention "the authority of the Court"; "the authority of the Church." Then you proceed to say, "The lawyer mistakes the meaning of the word 'authority' as used by theologians and philosophers." "We have generally found that the men who object to belief on authority understand by authority an order or command addressed to the will, without including anything to convince the reason or to motive the assent of the understanding. This is not precisely the theological sense of the term. The theologians understand by authority in matters of faith authority for believing as well as an order to believe. It is the reason which authorizes the belief, and is therefore primarily authority for the intellect, and furnishes it an ample reason to believe."



The language employed at the commencement of my second note was not sufficiently precise and probably misled you, but I think that what followed as well as what preceded sufficiently explained my meaning. I distinctly declared all authority to be personal. I did not say, and do not consider, authority to be in "the mind," or in "the Court," or in "the Church," or in "reason," or that it is an "order or command." It is submitted, also, that reason is not authority, nor is authority reason; the one being entirely different from the other. Nor are the words synonymous.

It seems to me ~~that~~ you have not defined the word authority. You say "theologians understand by authority in matters of faith authority for believing." Again, "they mean primarily by authority in matters of faith authority for believing;" defining the term by itself.

My notes, as you will observe did not pretend to define authority, but simply to call attention to the place of its residence, in the Person, - as distinguished from its ordinarily assumed residence, - in the so-called fact, or in something outside the person.

I will now, with your permission, proceed briefly to state what I understand by "authority."

If I have rejected the positive philosophy of





Complete, the philosophy based on the assumption of the reality of the objective world, so, on the other hand, I am forced to oppose the Cartesian philosophy in its relations to the subjective man.

I contend that cogito ergo sum is not axiomatic, because the being is not a necessary conclusion from the ego, that is to say; -

The person is superior to and distinguishable from his being or conditions; and reason is one of them.

If I say "I am"; "I" is superior to the "am"; and distinguishable from it, not as "being", but as authority for the being.

Descartes conceived the very existence of the thinker to be involved in the idea of thought. "Ac proinde hæc cognitio ego cogito ergo sum, est omnium prima et certissima, quæ cuilibet ordine philosophanti occurrat."

Princip. Philos. Pars. I §7

It is true he does not intend to present existence as a logical sequence of thought, but what he does mean is that consciousness of thought implies consciousness of existence, and that the two are inseparable. Admitting it to be so, it argues nothing more





than that if my thought be real, then my existence is real also. It brings the whole question back to the reality of the objective world; thought and existence included.

To this philosophy of materialism which inquires what is authoritative, I oppose the Philosophy of Personalism, which asks who is authoritative.

Obviously there can be no authority in the Bible, in a creed, in the decree of a council, in the enactment of a legislative body, in a government civil or spiritual, per se; nothing binding in a supposed scientific fact or so called truth in itself considered. For we refer the authority, not to the supposed fact, or truth, but solely to him who observes and passes upon it. Of it, he is, and must be, the sole judge and arbiter. He alone personally is the authority for whatever is presented for his consideration. And therefore, the question who is authoritative, instead of the question what is authoritative is the paramount question in philosophy. Who then is the ultimate authority? That inquiry I shall proceed briefly to consider.



As one cannot deny his own personality without assuming it, without, at the outset, saying I deny, or I affirm, so neither can he admit the authority of another, even of Deity, to be superior to that Ego without his own conscious personality passing authoritatively upon that conclusion.

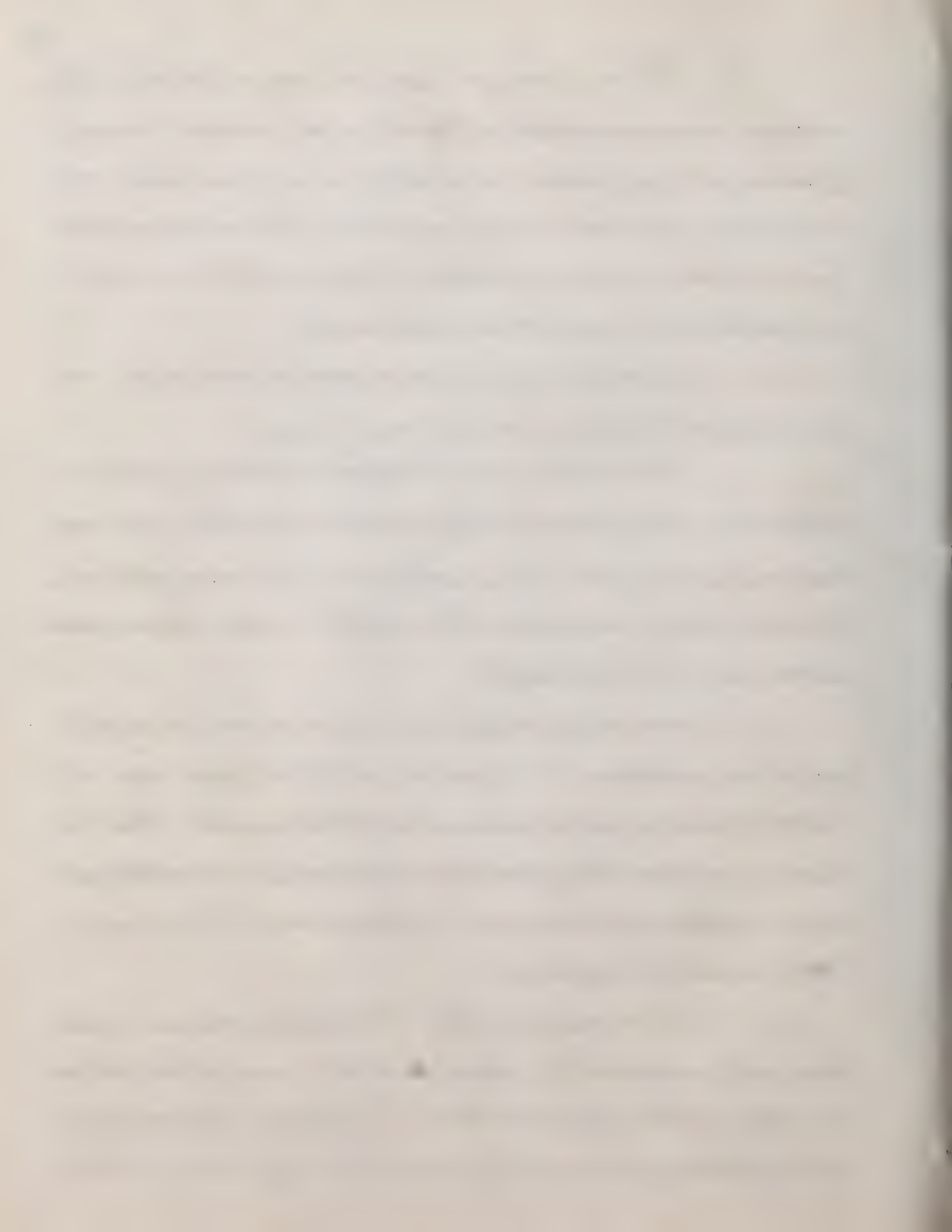
Authority is the conscious personality as distinguished from condition or being.

Those who quote Descartes plainly do not discriminate between thought and the thinker; between that condition of the mind which we call thought or reflection, and the personality which is the paramount authority for the thought.

Correctly speaking, it is not the thought which necessitates the thinker, as Descartes has it, but the thinker who occasions the thought. That is to say, without the thinker there could be no thought, and, to expand the idea, without the "I", to me there could be nothing.

The monosyllable "I" designates an independent, undefinable, unconditioned and therefore uncontrovertible consciousness, to which the terms being and existence are inapplicable. The Ego is neither





being nor condition; it is not phenomenal; and is not otherwise known than by the consciousness. It may be called consciousness itself.

On the other hand, the word "am" is the representative word for being (esse) and conditions; not alone in respect of those things material and immaterial intimately associated with, and the usual accompaniments of the personality, such as body, nerves, brain, opinions, thoughts, reason, sentiments, aspirations, but also of all those things which constitute "being," of whatever name and nature outside the personality, whether closely connected with it or not. Personality is the conscious authority, while everything not personality is "being" or Phenomena. Reason itself cannot be called that consciousness which goes by the name of the Person, and whose representative word is "I." Reason cannot judge of itself; although I am aware of a common notion that "There is nothing that can pretend to judge of reason but itself." Were I not superior to my reason, of what avail would it in its variable moods be to me? Reason does not possess me, but it is mine, my servant, and not the master. For its premises and deductions I am the supreme





authority and sanction. Reason, I repeat, is not personality, and cannot be confounded with it, nor can it be an authority for its own conclusions. That authority is the Ego, the only ultimate authority possible to humanity.

Descartes' formula should be changed from "Cogito ergo sum" (I think therefore I am) to Cogito ergo ego (I think therefore I.)

Do you insist that we differ as to the meaning of authority? I reply what then is this "I" which you pronounce so often; which precedes your vaunted reason, and, without which, you cannot even think, much less argue? What to you is its office and function? You may call it authority or some other name, it matters not; it is the Key of St. Peter, the Superior of all the Superiors of the Church. Do you inquire what this new philosophy means; whither it tends? It leads, I answer, beyond the Church, beyond the so-called divine right to govern, far into the realm of individual liberty. Do you exclaim that it is naught, a myth, a vapor without substance, a snare, a mirage for the soul, and demand some solution by it of human experience? Very well, observe its



application to religion, - this undeniable, authoritative Ego.

That which appears to me right, I cannot, because of this superior imperative consciousness, deny to appear so. It is not a matter of volition, since we cannot but approve what for the time we judge worthy of approval. Nor can I admit another person to controvert it; for that involves the absurdity of my passing upon that conclusion. Whatever therefore appears to me right, cannot at that precise time appear otherwise to me, because no argument or authority is, or can be, superior to that affirmation; and however much the people may be instructed to the contrary by subtle metaphysicians, what a man believes to be right, he will continue for the time to believe, because of the absolute impossibility of his believing otherwise until his views are changed. His belief is involuntary. No so called revelation or bible or church can weaken or strengthen this conviction; for, in the forcible language of Dr. Price, "whatever our conscience dictates to us, that He (the Deity) commands more evidently and undeniably, than if by a voice from Heaven we had been called upon to do it."





It is but another way of stating the simple law of conscience. The law is universal, catholic, axiomatic, obvious, but does it not destroy the pretensions of an authoritative visible Church?

Time fails me to unfold to you the noble sequences of this philosophy. In its application to science, it invites us to investigate; to art, it beckons us to keep pace with advancing civilization; to government, it recognizes no exclusive right either in the King or in the majority; to religion, it proclaims the true rule of duty.

The type of the philosophy on which the Church, the State rest, is the Pope, the Czar who with an arrogation of authority, places the crown upon his own head: the type of the philosophy of personalism is the poor man, the down trodden, the humble, who, although forgotten and unknown, is yet the real King, bearing in his own person that which for his highest rule is divinity itself. For what is divinity to him but the unconditioned!

Mistake me not. I do not claim the incarnation of divinity, that is causation, for man, but simply that in his own sphere and within the scope





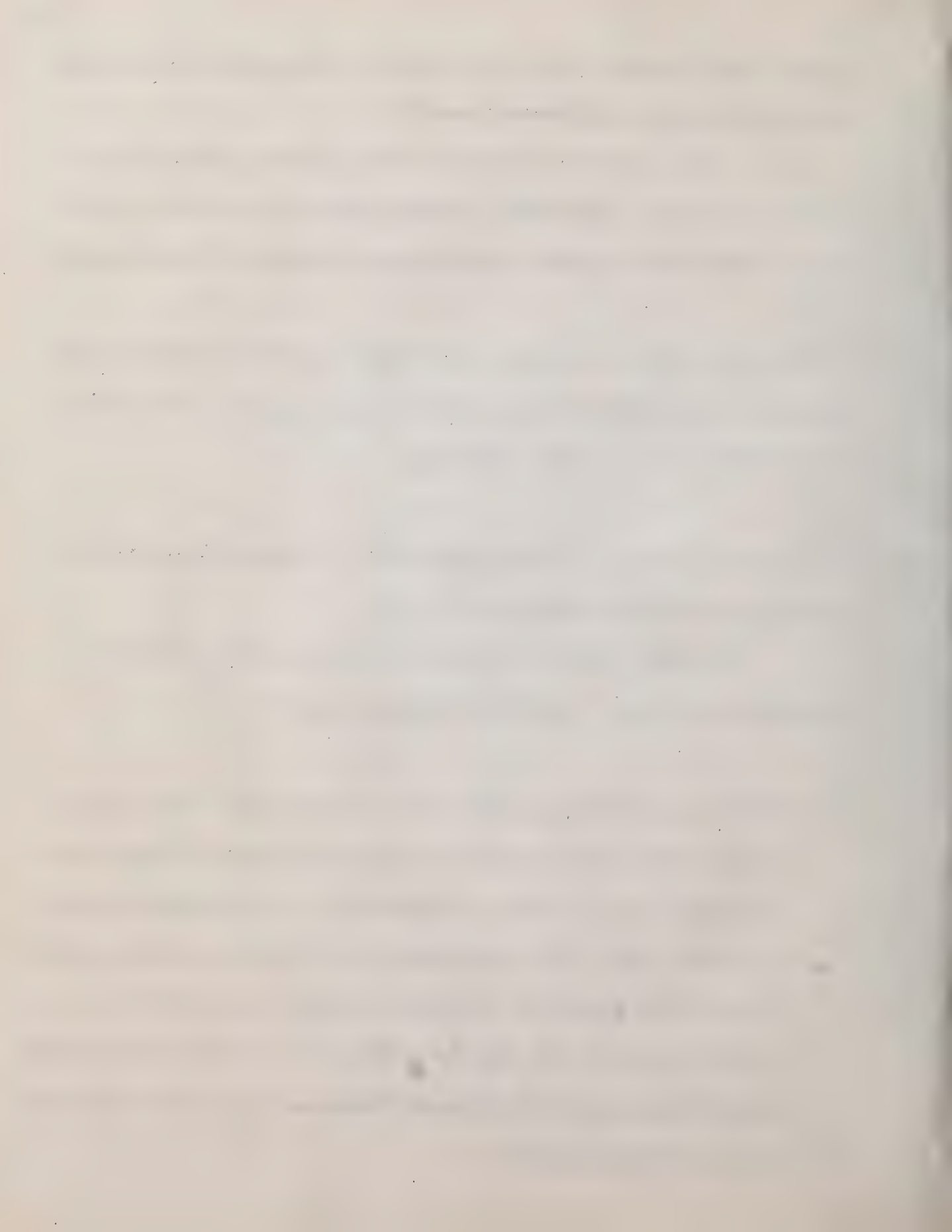
of his own vision, he is and must be regarded as the supreme unconditioned arbiter.

Permit me to close this already too long letter, which I fear has taxed your patience, with a formal statement of the conclusions to which I have arrived.

1. The Ego is the conscious ultimate authority for all phenomena of which the Ego takes cognizance; and hence no authority is in the Non Ego.
2. The term "being" is inapplicable to the personality, and cannot be predicated of it.

"Being" (which includes all mental operations) is phenomenal, while the Ego is not.

(1) The words "personality" and "authority" being equivalent, whatever does not constitute the Person is not authoritative. Hence, authority is not inherent in the Church, the Pope, the State, the King, the Bible; which are each and all illogical and impossible; as are also Treason, the Right of Eminent Domain, Divine and Hereditary Right and Privilege, in the common sense of those terms.



(2) Masculinity does not "carry the governmental function,"<sup>1</sup> nor is government sanctioned by divine or hereditary right, or by any assumption of authority, but by expediency and necessity; the expediency and necessity of individual protection in person and property growing out of the natural instinct of self preservation. To that extent only is government legitimate.

(3) Therefore the political question to be considered is, what form of government is best adapted to secure individual liberty.

(4) How far that liberty in person or property ought to be protected, is a question of morals to be determined by the individual, because he alone can determine moral questions for himself; and to that extent government rests on conscience.

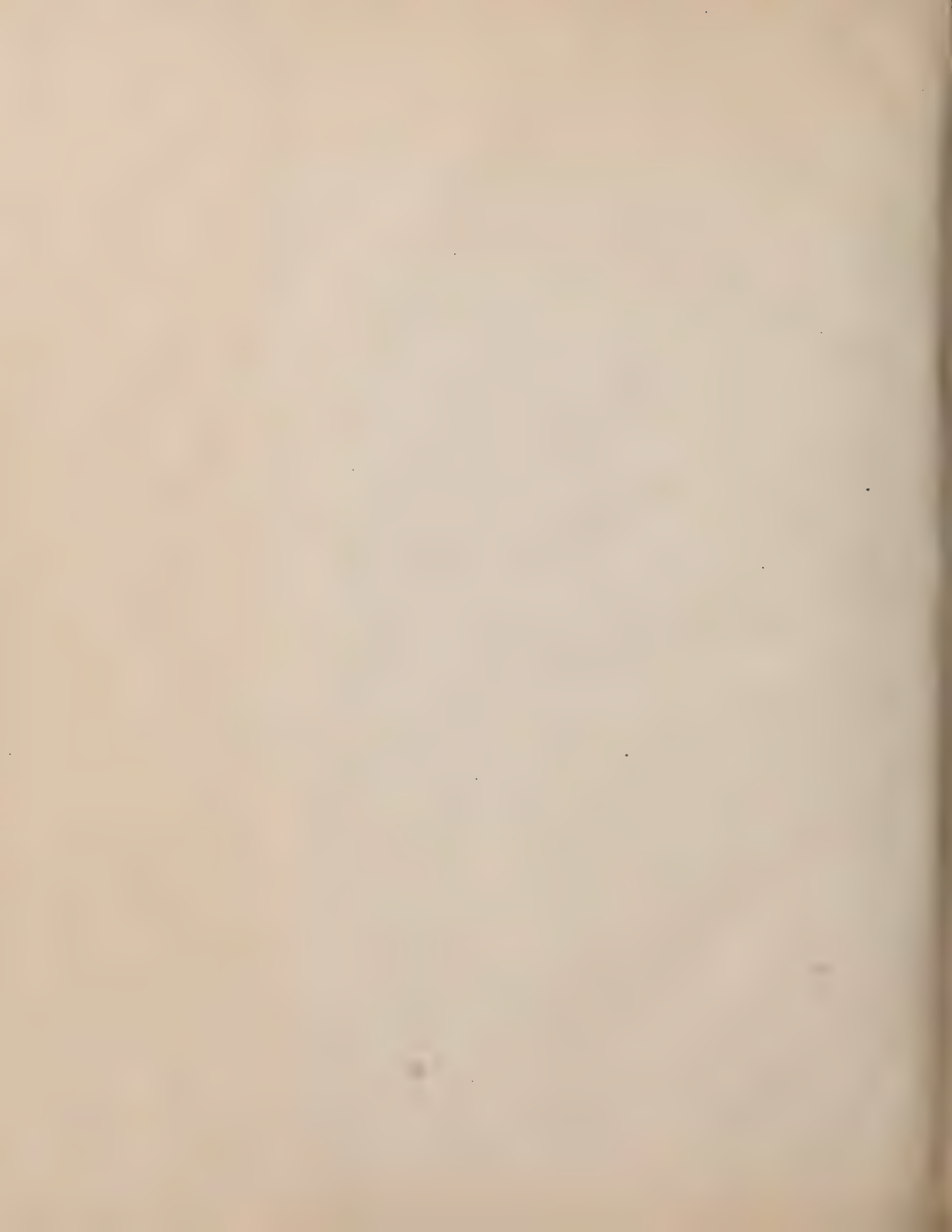
(5) How far that liberty shall be protected is a question of expediency, to be determined by the majority, because they have the power; and to that extent government rests on force.

August 14. Olmsted.




















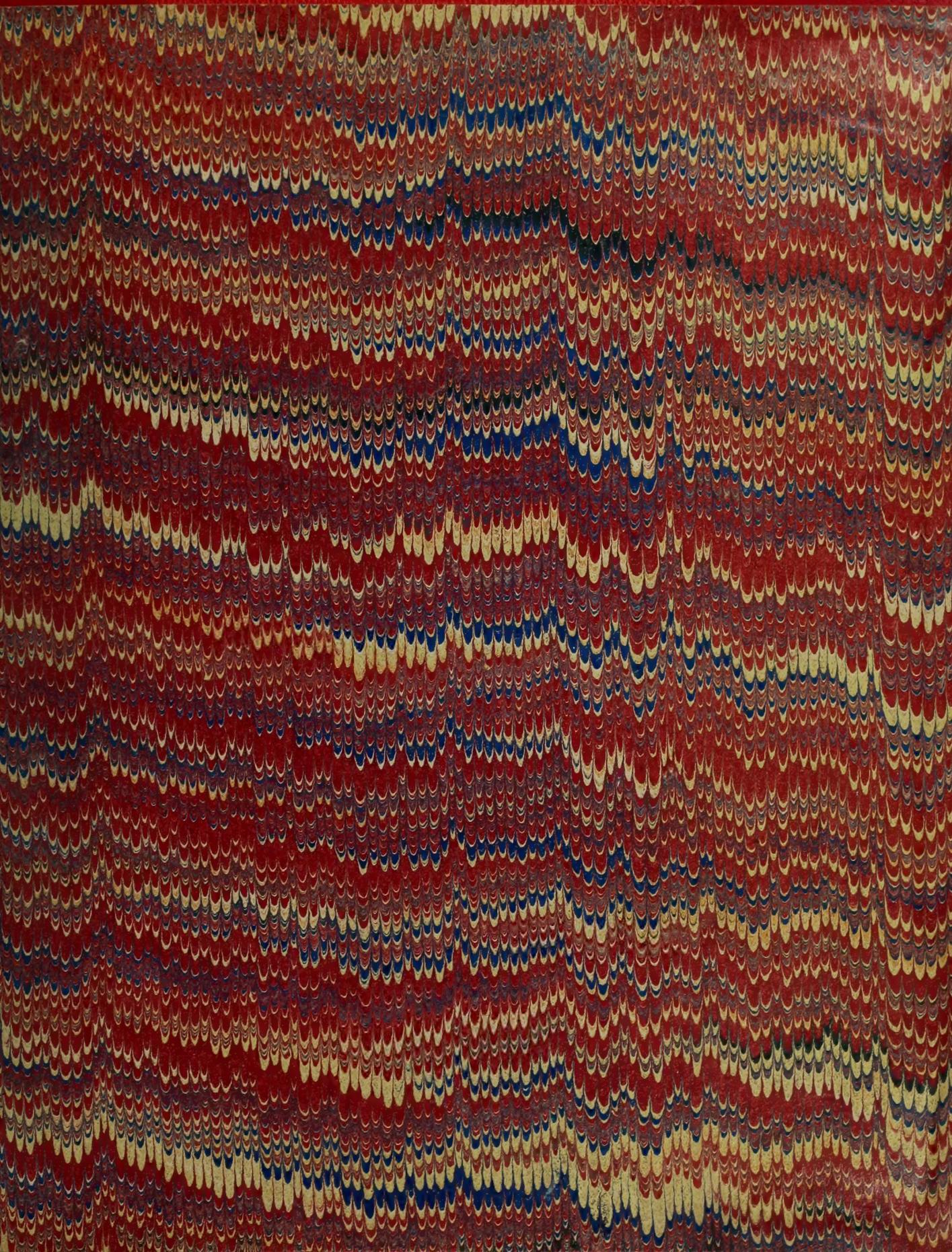


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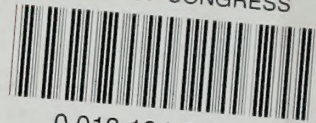
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